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U. S. Department of Agriculture

Thursday, May 3, 1934.

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3 Hh
HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Subject: "Home Improvements in Economy Times." Information from the Extension Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

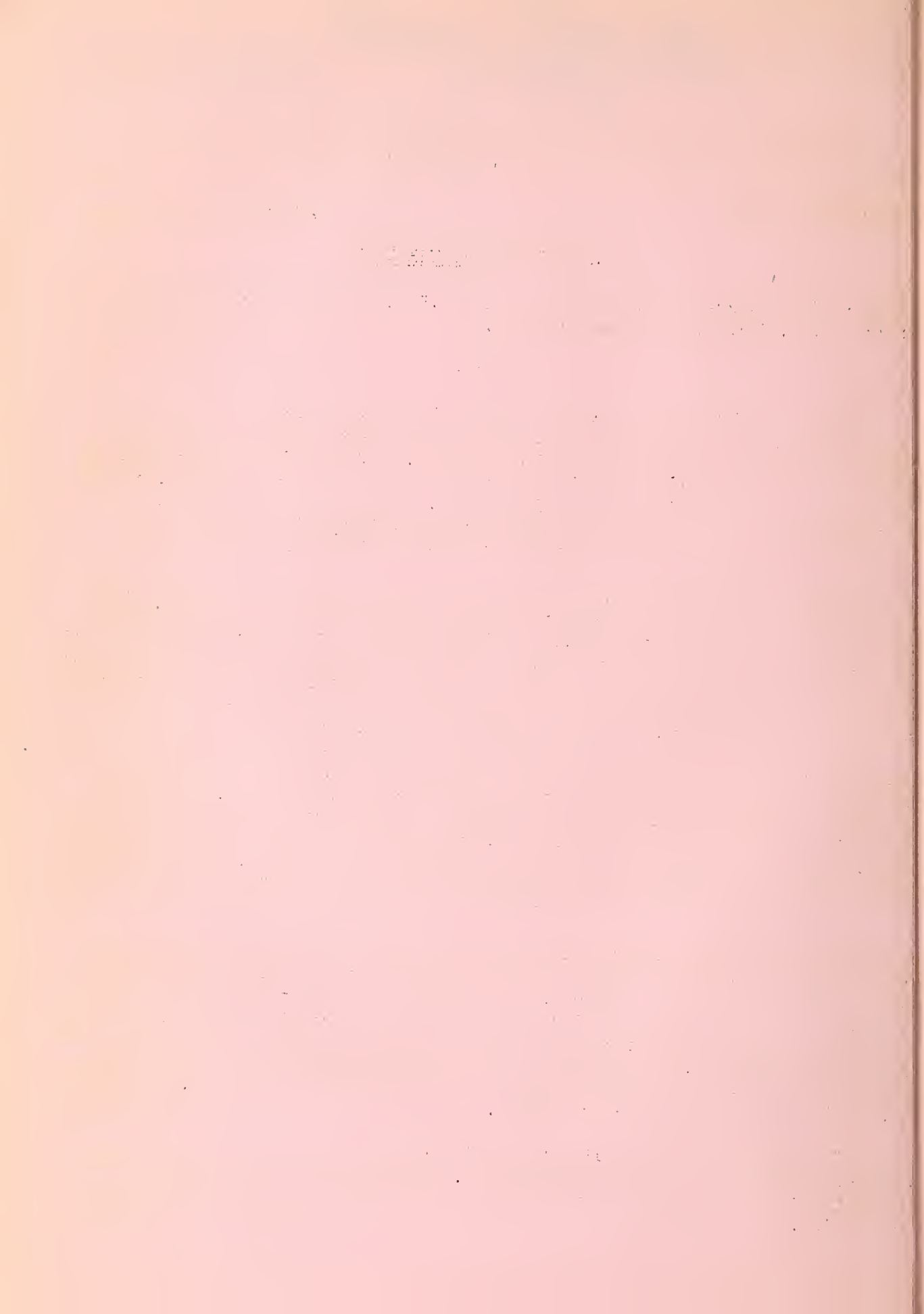
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Last week I told you how the women in Mississippi managed last year to fix up their homes -- make them more comfortable and convenient and better looking in spite of hard times and lack of cash. But for fear you'll think I'm partial to one state, let me tell you that women in every other state have been doing good jobs at beating Old Man Depression. They have shown that if you can't buy what you need, you can often go ahead and make it yourself, that ingenuity and will power can often take the place of money.

Remember how the Mississippi women solved the problem of uncomfortable beds by making their own mattresses of the raw cotton that they couldn't sell? Well, the women in Ohio and Indiana and Minnesota and other northern states have also had some bedding problems and have met them in much the same way. With no money for blankets, how could the family keep warm in winter? Well, farm families who raised sheep have learned how to clean and card their own wool and make it into bats for comforters. And those useful flour and sugar bags have again come in handy as covers for many of these home-made wool comforters. One woman in Ohio, the wife of a wool producer, made money enough to clothe herself and her daughter by selling the wool bats that she had washed and carded. Extension agents gave demonstrations in Ohio to show the women just how to care for the raw wool. This is a long and rather tedious process but well worth while to families who have the wool and have more time than money on their hands. Some of the husbands helped their wives do the carding in the evening. Often the whole family joined on this job, just as our early pioneer families used to do.

The women in South Carolina have saved a good deal by making their own cleaning supplies. They made their own brooms and brushes of local broom straw and even sold a good many of these. For wrappers to hold the straw to the wooden handle, they used inch-wide strips of rubber cut from old inner tubes. They also made their own soap -- laundry soap and cleaning soap, from the fat left from cooking or butchering. Soap-making is one of the thrift practices of our grandmothers that has become very popular again in these last hard years. Even rancid fat, unfit for cooking, makes good soap.

Women in Minnesota studied floor finishing last year and learned to make a successful crackfiller of old newspapers. They found that this homemade filler didn't shrink away with use as many of the fillers that they had formerly been buying.



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Perhaps no home craft has given rural families all over the country as much satisfaction nor added more to the appearance of their houses than furniture-finishing. Women have learned how to remodel old pieces completely -- how to refinish the wood, cut down ugly and useless decorations, and even re-upholster and make slip covers. The housing specialist in New York State studied upholstery and refinishing in several furniture factories. Under her guidance, women in that state have made good looking and comfortable chairs and lounges from discarded, broken-down pieces and even from ugly and uncomfortable models. A homemaker in Minnesota went home from a meeting on refinishing furniture and promptly started to refinish six old dining-room chairs, a dining table, a sewing machine and flower stand, a very successful job. Think of the saving in money as well as the pleasure to the whole family in all these home ventures.

Besides these larger projects, housewives made many little changes that didn't cost a cent but helped to make their homes more pleasant and their work easier.

For example, changes as a result of studying convenient heights for various working surfaces have saved backs and shoulders and dispositions. All over the country this year women who couldn't afford new furnishings reported the ways that they had improved their kitchens without spending. They lowered or raised their ironing boards to make ironing easier. They made benches for their washtubs that brought the tubs up to a convenient height for working. They cut down old-fashioned washstands, fastened on casters, and made convenient push-tables for their kitchens. Several also found that wood-boxes on casters saved them a good deal of lifting and carrying.

Here is what one woman wrote about the meetings held in her county on home laundering. "The women in our club all do their own washing, so we were much interested in the discussion on laundry methods. We learned a lot on how we could save ourselves when hanging up clothes by setting the basket on Junior's play wagon or on a rack of convenient height rather than way down on the ground where we had to stoop for the clothes. No one had ever told us about that before. This one little point in the lesson will save us a lot of backaches."

Another woman who went to this meeting reported that on reaching home she cut down an old high chair and made a convenient stool which she now sits on whenever she irons and finds that she is no longer worn out at the end of the day.

Well, here are just a few ways in which housewives here and there have done their part in emergency times. I'm not advocating more homework for wives and mothers, especially those on farms. They always have their hands full anyway. But often a pleasant convenient house is a big help to the happiness of the whole family, and well worth some extra labor.

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